

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 9200

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, IN
SUBJ: CHOOSING THE JANATA CHIEF MINISTERS: IMPLICA-
TIONS FOR THE FUTURE

REF: NEW DELHI 8910

SUMMARY: THE ELECTION OF THE JANATA LEGISLATIVE PARTY
LEADERS (AND HENCE CHIEF MINISTERS) IN THE SEVEN STATES
WHERE THE PARTY WON OUTRIGHT MAJORITIES HAS PRODUCED
ANGRY CHARGES THAT CERTAIN NATIONAL LEADERS "MANIPULATED"
THE ELECTION PROCESS. THERE IS GOOD EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST
THAT HOME MINISTER (AND BLD LEADER) CHARAN SINGH AND
JANA SANGH ORGANIZER NANAJI DESHMUKH DID INDEED ARRANGE
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TO DIVY UP THE CHIEF MINISTERSHIPS AMONG THE BLD AND JANA
SANGH SUPPORTERS. NEITHER THE PM NOR THE PARTY PRE-
SIDENT APPEAR TO HAVE PLAYED ANY ROLE IN THE PROCESS.
LEGISLATORS BELONGING TO THE CONGRESS (O) AND CFD ARE
REPORTEDLY ANGRY AND DISGRUNLED OVER THIS APPARENT
BLD/JANA SANGH CONDOMINIUM AND THE NAMING OF FULL CABINET
LISTS HAS BEEN DELAYED IN MOST STATES AS A RESULT. SOME

DISGRUNTLED ELEMENTS DARKLY WARN THAT THIS AFFAIR PRESAGES THE EVENTUAL DOMINATION OF THE JANATA BY THE BLD AND JANA SANGH TO THE EXCLUSION OF ALL OTHERS. ALTHOUGH WE CURRENTLY BELIEVE THAT JANATA WILL SURMOUNT THIS LATEST "TEETHING PROBLEM", THE CONTROVERSY DEMONSTRATES THE CONTINUING STRENGTH OF OLD LOYALTIES WITHIN THE RULING PARTY, AS WELL AS THE STRENGTH AND COHESIVENESS OF THE BLD AND THE JANA SANGH GROUPS IN THE HINDI-SPEAKING STATES. CHARAN SINGH AND NANAJI DESHMUKH HAVE EMERGED WITH ENHANCED PRESTIGE AND POWER AND ARE LIKELY TO PLAY INFLUENTIAL ROLES IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE SEVEN STATES. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE CFD HAS SUFFERED A FURTHER LOSS OF PRESTIGE. THE PRIME MINISTER'S APPARENT ALOOFNESS DURING THE CHIEF MINISTERIAL ELECTIONS MAY INDICATE THAT HE INTENDS TO LEAVE THE MANAGEMENT OF PARTY AFFAIRS TO HIS LIEUTENANTS. JANATA'S INTERNAL DISSENSIONS SINCE ITS FORMATION SUGGESTS TO SOME THAT IT IS SLIPPING INTO THE "OLD STYLE" OF POLITICS PRACTICED BY THE CONGRESS PARTY AND THAT ITS POPULAR IMAGE COULD BE TARNISHED AS A RESULT. WE WOULD ESTIMATE, HOWEVER, THAT PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE RULING PARTY MAY DEPEND MORE UPON ITS PERFORMANCE IN OFFICE THAN ITS INTERNAL MODE OF OPERATION. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ELECTION OF THE JANATA LEGISLATIVE PARTY LEADERS (AND HENCE CHIEF MINISTERS) IN THE SEVEN STATES WHERE THE
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PARTY WON OUTRIGHT MAJORITIES (REFTEL) HAS PRODUCED ANGRY CHARGES BY SEVERAL OF THE UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES THAT CERTAIN NATIONAL FIGURES "INTERFERED" IN AND "MANIPULATED" THE ELECTION PROCESS TO ENSURE THE VICTORY OF THEIR OWN LOYAL SUPPORTERS. IN PARTICULAR THEY ALLEGE THAT, CONTRARY TO THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP'S PLEDGE THAT MLA'S WOULD BE FREE TO VOTE AS THEY WISHED, JANA SANGH LEADER NANAJI DESHMUKH ORDERED JANA SANGH LEGISLATORS IN UP AND BIHAR TO VOTE FOR A PARTICULAR CANDIDATE. AS WOULD BE EXPECTED, THE PRESS HAS GIVEN PROMINENCE TO THESE ALLEGATIONS AND THERE HAS BEEN AMPLE EDITORIAL COMMENT.

2. THERE IS GOOD EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT SOME SORT OF AN UNDERSTANDING WAS ARRANGED BETWEEN HOME MINISTER (AND BLD LEADER) CHARAN SINGH AND JANA SANGH ORGANIZER NANAJI DESHMUKH, NOW A JANATA GENERAL SECRETARY, TO DIVY UP THE CHIEF MINISTERSHIPS AMONG THEIR BLD AND JANA SANGH SUPPORTERS. SUPPORTING THIS WIDE-SPREAD BELIEF IS THE FACT THAT ALL SEVEN CHIEF MINISTERS WERE MEMBERS OF EITHER THE JANA SANGH OR BLD BEFORE THE MERGER OF THESE PARTIES INTO JANATA ON MAY 1. ALTHOUGH IT IS TRUE THAT

MLA'S FROM THESE TWO GROUPS CONSTITUTE THE BULK OF THE JANATA LEGISLATORS IN THESE STATES AND THUS IT IS NATURAL THAT THE CHIEF MINISTERS SHOULD ALSO BE FORMER BLD OR JANA SANGH MEMBERS, MANY OBSERVERS HERE ARE CONVINCED THAT AT THE VERY LEAST THERE WAS A BROAD UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE JANATA LEADERSHIP ON THE FAVORED CANDIDATES FOR THE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS THERE. SEVERAL PROMINENT JANATA FIGURES, IN FACT, HAVE ALL BUT CONFIRMED THIS IN CONVERSATIONS WITH US. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT ALL REPORTS WE HAVE HEARD AGREE THAT NEITHER PM DESAI NOR PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHAR PLAYED ANY ROLE IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

3. SO FAR, THE CONTROVERSY HAS NOT REACHED CRISIS
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PROPORTIONS WITHIN THE JANATA PARTY, BUT WE HEAR THAT LEGISLATORS BELONGING TO THE CONGRESS (O) AND CFD ARE ANGRY AND DISGRUNTLED OVER THE AFFAIRS. A GROUP OF SOME 85 JANATA "DISSIDENTS" IN BIHAR HAVE DEMANDED A PARTY INQUIRY INTO DESHMUKH'S ACTIVITIES AND HAVE THREATENED TO WITHHOLD THEIR SUPPORT FROM THE JANATA STATE GOVERNMENT. ONE APPARENT SIGN OF DISCORD WITHIN PARTY RANKS IS THE DELAY IN NAMING FULL CABINET LISTS IN SEVERAL STATES. THE NEW CHIEF MINISTERS ARE EVIDENTLY REWORKING THEIR LISTS IN THE HOPE OF ASSUAGING DISGRUNTLED ELEMENTS BY GIVING THEM A GREATER SHARE OF MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS. OUR PRESENT ASSESSMENT IS THAT JANATA WILL SURMOUNT THE PROBLEM WITHOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO ITS ABILITY TO GOVERN.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 9200

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

4. WHATEVER WAS THE PRECISE NATURE OF INTERVENTION BY
NTIONAL PARTY BOSSES IN CHOOSING THE CHIEF MINISTERS,
THE PROCESS OF SELECTION AND THE OUTCRY IT PROVOKED
REFLECT THE CONTINUED STRENGTH OF OLD PARTY LOYALTIES
WITHIN THE JANATA. PARTY LEADERS READILY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT
JANATA STILL SUFFERS FROM "TEETHING PROBLEMS" IN THE SCANT
EIGHT WEEKS SINCE THE FORMAL MERGER. THEY BELIEVE A YEAR
OR TWO OR EVEN MORE TIME, MAY BE REQUIRED FOR THE CON-
STITUENT PARTIES TO FULLY SHED THEIR PREVIOUS LOYALTIES.
ON THE OTHER HAND, SOME CFD AND CONGRESS (O) FIGURES SAY
THAT THIS APPARENT BLD/JANA SANGH CONDOMINIUM IN ELECTING
THE CHIEF MINISTERS NOT ONLY DEMONSTRATES THE STRENGTH
OF THESE TWO GROUPS AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE,
BUT ALSO PORTENDS THE EVENTUAL DOMINATION OF THE JANATA
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BY JANA SANGH AND BLD ELEMENTS TO THE EXCLUSION OF ALL
OTHERS. THEY SAY THAT CHARAN SINGH'S "MARRIAGE OF CON-
VENIENCE" WITH NANAJI DESHMUKH IS DESIGNED TO MAKE HIM
(CHARAN SINGH) THE UNDISPUTED STRONG MAN OF THE PARTY,
BUT IN THE LONG RUN IT IS THE JANA SANGH WITH ITS SUPERIOR
CADRE AND ORGANIZATION THAT WILL EMERGE THE ULTIMATE
VICTOR. STORIES ABOUND ON THE HOME MINISTER'S UNLIMITED
AMBITIONS, AND THE LATEST RUMOR HAS IT THAT CHARAN SINGH
WANTS MORARJI DESAI TO BECOME INDIA'S PRESIDENT IN ORDER
TO MAKE ROOM FOR HIMSELF AS PRIME MINISTER. THE STORY
IS CERTAINLY FACIFUL, BUT WE MENTION IT AS AN EXAMPLE OF
THE STORIES CURRENTLY IN VOGUE ON THE HOME MINISTER'S
INTENTIONS.

5. TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY LINED UP THEIR BLD AND JANA
SANGH SUPPORTERS INTO SOLID VOTING BLOCS, IT DOES SEEM
CLEAR TO US THAT CHARAN SINGH, HIS LIEUTENANT RAJ NARAIN
AND ALLY BIJU PATNAIK, AND NANAJI DESHMUKH HAVE EMERGED
FROM THE LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS IN POSITIONS OF ENHANCED

PRESTIGE AND POWER. WHATEVER THEIR ACTUAL ROLES WERE, AT LEAST IT IS THE WIDESPREAD PERCEPTION HERE THAT THEY SECURED THE VICTORY OF THEIR CANDIDATES IN THE SEVEN STATES AND HENCE WILL BECOME THE NATIONAL FIGURES TO WHOM THE NEWLY-ELECTED CHIEF MINISTERS WILL OWE PRIMARY ALLEGIANCE. UP IS A CASE IN POINT: THE SELECTION OF THE VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN AND ADMINISTRATIVELY INEXPERIENCED RAM NARESH YADAV SUGGESTS THAT CHARAN SINGH WILL BE THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE IN UP AND THAT YADAV WILL ACT AS HIS AGENT IN THE STATE. RAJ NARAIN MAY PLAY A SIMILAR ROLE IN HARYANA, WHERE CHIEF MINISTER DEVI LAL IS REGARDED AS HIS "CHELA" (DISCIPLE), AND BIJU PATNAIK IS LIKELY TO EXERT CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE OVER AFFAIRS IN ORISSA. ALTHOUGH HE MAY NOT EXERCISE QUITE THE SAME ROLE AS

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POLITICAL PATRON OF THE JANA SANGH CHIEF MINISTERS, THE LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS HAVE ALSO AGAIN DEMONSTRATED DESHMUKH'S PREEMINENCE AS THE SANGH'S ORGANIZER. SIGNIFICANTLY, NEITHER OF THE JANA SANGH'S LEADING CABINET MEMBERS, ADVANI OR VAJPAYEE, APPEARS TO HAVE PLAYED A ROLE IN THE CHIEF MINISTER STAKES, THUS SUGGESTING THAT DESHMUKH WILL CONTINUE TO EXERCISE THE MAJOR ROLE IN ORGANIZING AND CONTROLLING THE JANA SANGH/RSS CADRE IN COMING YEARS AND IN ACTING AS THE FOCAL POINT FOR THE PROJECTION OF JANA SANGH/RSS POWER IN THE JANATA ORGANIZATION.

6. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE CHIEF MINISTERIAL ELECTION CONFIRMS THE WEAKENED POSITION OF THE CFD. CFD LEADERS APPEARED TO HAVE PLAYED NO ROLE IN THE PROCESS. H.N. BAHUGUNA, ONCE THE STRONG MAN OF UP POLITICS, HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED AS A FORCE TO RECKON WITH IN THE STATE AND IS REPORTED TO BE SULLEN AND ANGRY AT THE SETBACK DEALT TO HIM BY CHARAN SINGH. JAGJIVAN RAM'S PRESTIGE HAS ALSO SUFFERED. THERE IS SPECULATION THAT HE MAY BE OFFERED THE PRESIDENCY AS COMPENSATION FOR THE ALMOST TOTAL ECLIPSE OF HIS CFD, AND THAT HIS PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL REALITIES MAY LEAD HIM TO ACCEPT THE NOMINATION.

7. THE PRIME MINISTER APPARENTLY REMAINED IN THE BACKGROUND DURING THE ELECTION OF THE CHIEF MINISTERS, AND WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT HE EXERTED OR SOUGHT TO EXERT ANY INFLUENCE OVER THE CHOICE OF CANDIDATES. THIS MAY BE AN INDICATION THAT DESAI WISHES TO REMAIN ABOVE THE FRAY OF NORMAL JANATA POLITICS, TO PLAY THE ROLE OF ELDER STATESMAN AND TO LEAVE THE MANAGEMENT OF PARTY AFFAIRS TO PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHAR (HIMSELF AN APPARENT SILENT SPECTATOR TO THE CHIEF MINISTER EXERCISE) AND TO REGIONAL AND CONSTITUENT-PARTY BASED STRONGMEN

SUCH AS CHARAN SINGH AND DESHMUKH.

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8. SINCE ITS FORMATION ALMOST TWO MONTHS AGO, THE JANATA HAS APPEARED TO HAVE BEGUN SLIPPING INTO THE "OLD STYLE" POLITICS OF THE CONGRESS YEARS. THE SCRAMBLE OVER TICKETS, CHARAN SINGH'S OCCASIONAL ACTS OF PETULANCE (SEE NEW DELHI 7118, CONCERNING THE "BLD LETTER EPISODE") AND NOW THE APPARENT BLD"JANA SANGH UNDERSTANDING ON THE CHIEF MINISTERS SUGGESTS TO SOME OBSERVERS THAT THE NEW RULING PARTY--DESPITE ITS BRIGHT IMAGE OF THE LOK SABHA POLL--MAY BE NO MORE SCRUPULOUS OR MORALISTIC IN APPROACHING THE BASIC ISSUE OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER THAN THE PREVIOUS ONES. WHETHER THIS REVERSION FROM THE PROMISE OF GREATER OPENNESS TO THE FAMILIAR PAST PRACTICES OF BACK ROOM POLITICS WILL LEAD TO ANY SERIOUS DISILLUSION WITH THE POLITICAL PROCESS ON THE PART OF MANY INDIANS REMAINS TO BE SEEN. OUR PRESENT ASSESSMENT IS THAT MANY SIMPLY ACCEPT SUCH ARRANGEMENTS AS THE NATURAL ORDER OF AFFAIRS AND IN PARTICULAR VIEW BARGAINING ON THE BASIS OF CONSTITUENT PARTY STRENGTH AS THE ONLY REALISTIC WAY TO GO ABOUT DECISION MAKING IN A NEW ORGANIZATION OF SUCH DIVERSE ANTECEDENTS. WE WOULD ESTIMATE THAT IN ANY EVENT PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE RULING PARTY ARE LIKELY TO DEPEND MORE UPON ITS PERFORMANCE IN OFFICE THAN ITS INTERNAL MANEUVERINGS. RESOLUTION OF THE ISSUES OF LEADERSHIP AND COMPOSITION OF THE NEW STATE GOVERNMENTS WILL HELP CLEAR THE WAY FOR JANATA TO FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTING ITS PROGRAMS, TILL NOW LARGELY NEGLECTED IN THE CONCENTRATION OF THE PARTY ON POLITICAL PROBLEMS. GOHEEN

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